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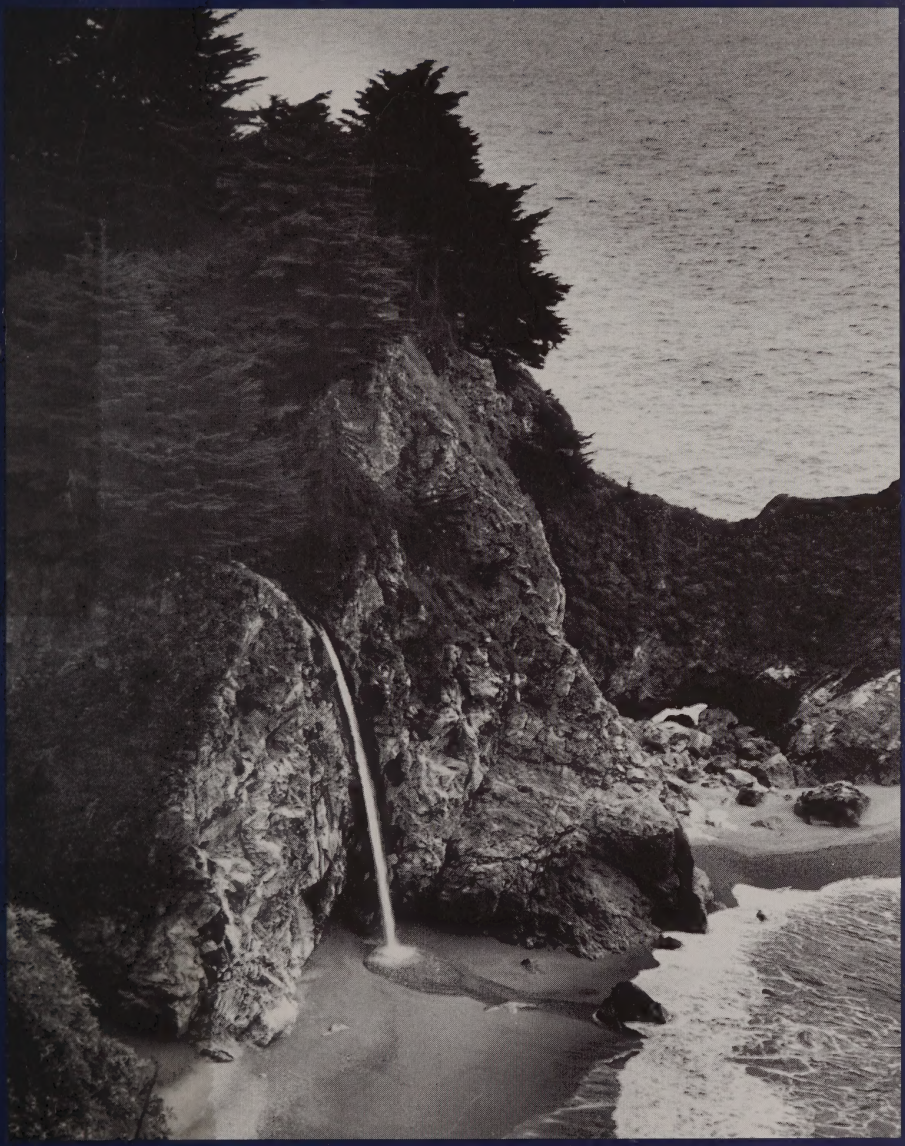
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ OCTOBER 1999

SACRED JOURNEY™

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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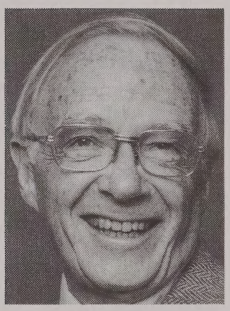
Cover photo by Robert Campbell

FROM THE PRESIDENT



"Help me, help me, help me," and "Thank you, thank you, thank you," are the two favorite prayers of Anne Lamott, as she tells us in her delightful new book, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith.* Dr. Larry Dossey touches on the same thought in his *Prayer is Good Medicine:* "You don't really require cathedrals, churches, priests or ministers," he says, "Prayer is and has always been a matter of the heart—a person's attempt to communicate with the absolute." This intention, this desire, is what Dr. Dossey calls "prayerfulness."

He quotes Dorothy Day, who said, "I believe some people—lots of people—pray through the witness of their lives, through the work they do, the friendships they have, the love they offer people and receive from people. Since when are words the only acceptable form of prayer?"

Music, singing, dancing, work, meditation, writing, walking a labyrinth—all these and more can be powerful and heartfelt ways of praying—as you'll learn at Fellowship in Prayer's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" gathering in Princeton in June, 2000.

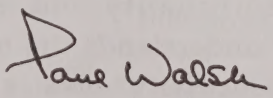
Prayerfulness is an attitude toward life that recognizes the Spirit within us and all around us. For example, you'll recognize that attitude in the words of the man who answered a question that appeared in our e-mail supple-

ment a while back. The question was: "How do you relate to or experience God or the Ultimate Reality?" His answer was:

> ". . . the reality of my personal experience of God is the higher power I perceive daily as a gentle but constant wind in my life, shaping my day and external reality, not by force, but by love. I find God in meditation, which seems to have a cumulative effect, transforming me from a panic-stricken child in a threatening world, to a more detached, patient, and less time-bound observer of my emotional and physical reactions who can respond more appropriately, based on love . . . And I find God in the quiet, still voice in my mind (an intuition, perhaps) that reminds me, when I am patient enough to listen, that I have the freedom to act in new ways that can bring about new results in emotionally stressful situations. In all these ways, I experience God as here and now."

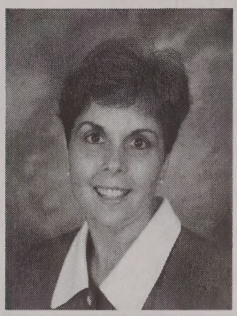
This affirmation of the presence of God in our friend's life is the result of his willingness to be open to, and in touch with, the small miracles of everyday life by which that presence shows itself. That ongoing spiritual interchange is perhaps what is meant by the phrase, "to pray without ceasing."

God willing, I'll see you in Princeton in June!



Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



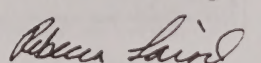
Gold, brown, and pink fish dart and surface with mouths agape when awaiting food in my backyard pond. At the slightest hint of trouble, all disappear behind quickly fading water lilies that bloomed a brilliant pink all summer. Sometimes I sit beside these still waters and watch this microcosm with awe. Here, fish, frogs, snails, lilies, algae, and tiny creatures I cannot see, coexist and react visibly to the amount of sun, the temperature of the water, and the infrequent but grand appearances of the local blue heron. They invisibly are preparing for winter. Then, the fish and frogs will hang as if suspended between life and death when the water freezes over. The plants will brown, wilt, and decay. Newness hides as dormancy takes over for a season. All this life and change takes place in a small rock-hewn body of water in my yard.

This month a variety of voices remind us of the vital, life-giving, indeed sacred, aspects of water and all of nature. This month in an interview conducted by Thomas Rain Crowe, Thomas Berry, one of the great voices for spirituality and ecology, says that once a person "understands the mystique of rain," a "new religious sensitivity" creates a sense of awe and respect for the earth. In "The Path of Blessing," Rabbi Marsha Prager

poetically describes how a simple Hebrew blessing is like a "hand on the faucet" causing God's love and goodness to pour into the world. (Rabbi Prager will further explore the spiritual practice of blessing in a workshop at next summer's *Companions on the Sacred Journey* conference.) Joni Woelfel, in *A Transforming Experience,* recalls a time of healing when she longed to walk to a nearby lake but didn't have the strength. In time, she discovered the healing waters of the well within. Rabbi Allen Maller in *Spiritual Community* updates a process from the Middle Ages where one would walk by a nearby river and toss bread crumbs into the waters and watch the currents carry away the "sinprints," the many lingering burdens from the past year. "Autumn Reflections" by Richard Broderick, shows how nature and a traditional Mexican celebration both teach that "life and death are partners in the dance." Pilgrim Renee Carrier travels to San Benito, a Benedictine monastery in Wyoming, where the autumn mists lift momentarily so that revelation can reach her. Poets Andrea Burman, Carl Wertman, and Hilary Thompson evoke images of darkness, autumn leaves, and moonlight to explore the penetrating presence of God. Lastly, Mary Davidson in "Natural Reminders of God's Love" points to the practical mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, who, "when it rained, thought of God's blessings raining down on all people and creatures."

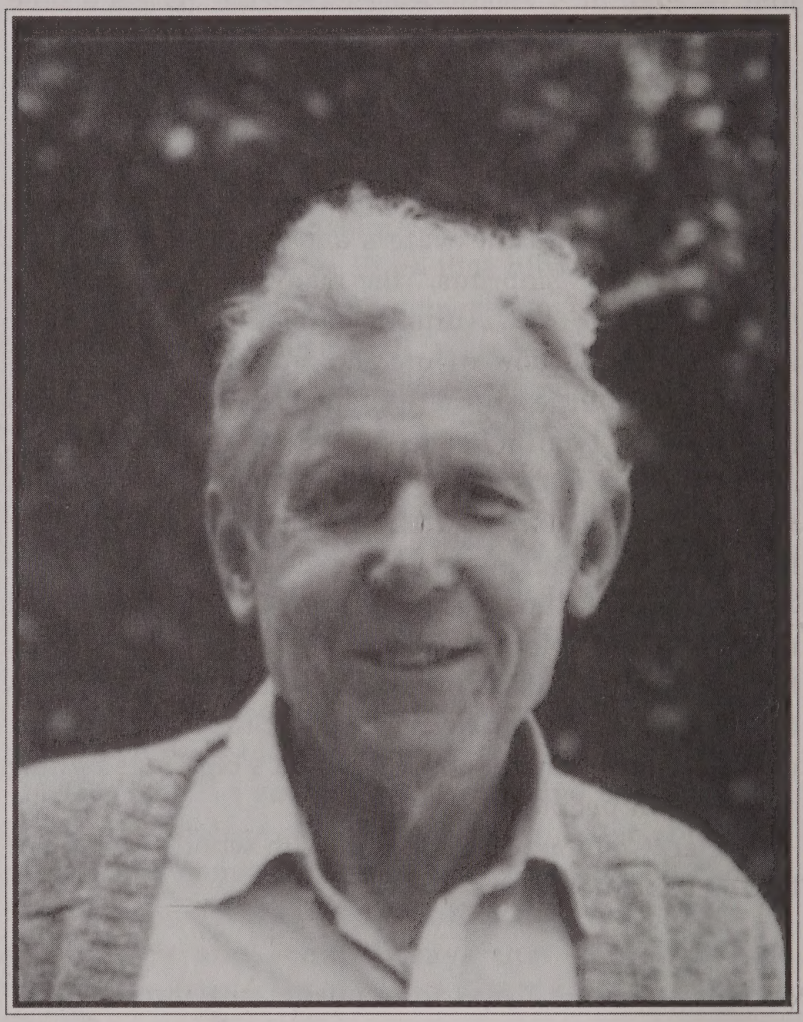
So let it rain and let us recall with wonder our place in God's creation.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

Thomas Berry



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The Old/New Cosmic Story

Thomas Berry

Thomas Rain Crowe, Editor-at-Large for the Asheville Poetry Review *and author of* In Wineseller's Street, *a translation of the Persian mystic poet, Hafiz, conducted the following interview with Rev. Dr. Thomas Berry.*

Thomas Berry is one of the great voices for spirituality and ecology in our time. For many years Dr. Berry held teaching positions at Catholic, St. John's and Fordham Universities. From 1976 to 1987, Father Berry served as president of the American Teilhard Association dedicated to the teachings and writings of Teilhard de Chardin, the influential French scientist-priest. From this position Berry developed his own interpretation of the spirituality of the earth and promoted an awareness of the interconnected quality of all reality.

Since his retirement from teaching, Thomas Berry has devoted his life to investigating earth history and the process of evolution. Berry is author of The Dream of the Earth, Earth Story, Sacred Story, *and* Creative Energy *and lives in Greensboro, NC. His book* The Real Work *will be published by Crown Publishers later this year.*

Thomas Rain Crowe: You have written that our understanding of ourselves as humans is dependent upon our understanding of the universe and of universal physics. Could you elaborate a little on how you see this idea working in practical and applicable ways?

Thomas Berry: This is very simple, but may take a few minutes to explain. It is simple in the sense that the "universe story" is also our individual story. It is one of the reasons why we need to know the story of the universe.

All major religions have a basic myth of creation–how things came into being, how they came to be as they are, and what our human role is in the process. We, today, have a new myth of the universe. We have attained it differently. These earlier mythic stories were based less on empirical observation. They were intuitive. These stories functioned in the special mode of consciousness–the universe is just there. It remains what it is no matter what humans do. In our new story, the universe is an emerging process. In other words, things were never what they are now. There is a great need to understand the sequence of universal emergence–the shaping of the galaxies, the shaping of the earth, and the refined shaping of human consciousness. This story is our personal story. We begin where the universe begins. Our souls begin to be shaped, as well as our bodies, at that time. From the beginning there has been, on a universal scale, a psychic and spiritual, as well as, material process, unfolding and developing. So there is an intelligibility that has been there from the beginning. The same is true of the atom. The atom

is a magnificent, radiant storm of intellect. It is the manifestation, one might say, of ultimate mystery.

Now, it's well understood that the so-called objective world that is out there and a subject that humans know from a distance, just doesn't exist. Humans are integral with the universe—the knowing principle and the subject known are intimately interwoven. Our understanding of the universe is the only entree into the understanding of ourselves.

Crowe: How would you express this cosmic/biology lesson in more earthly terms?

Berry: The idea that the universe is best understood as organic and personal is one embraced by many societies. The Chinese belief, the "*dashwe*," that is the "great learning" also stresses that the "great person" is one who identifies with the universe to form one body.

Kwan Yun Min, for example, in the early 16th Century, was talking about this to his students. One of his students asked, "How do you know that you are one body with the Universe?" Kwan Yun Min answered saying, "Take an infant just born–anyone, whether they were good or evil, would instinctively respond to save that child if it were in danger. The truth of this fact proves that we have an identity with that child." Then the student asked, "Well, that was a human being, what about other kinds of life?" And Kwan Yun Min says, "Well, a bird, if you see a bird wounded, you feel something yourself. You feel some kind of sympathy for the bird's suffering, which demonstrates a unity between the man and the bird." The student then asks the same question of Kwan Yun Min regarding insects, flowers,

stones. . . .In each case Kwan Yun Min explains our connectedness with all forms of material life.

Through this line of recognition and reasoning, it becomes quickly apparent that if we are damaging our outer world, we are, at the same time, damaging our inner world. And it is this reason that acts of personal sacrifice for family, community, and our planet, are not felt with any sense of loss or burden because through these spontaneous acts, although we lose something of our personal self, our "family self" or "community self" is enhanced.

Crowe: In your book *The Dream of the Earth* you state that human life has violated the earth's sacred aspects. What specifically have humans done to the earth?

Berry: Well, we've violated habitat, for one thing. Habitat is sacred. We've violated the rivers by making them toxic. We've violated the air by poisoning the air. We've violated the ozone by breaking a hole in it. We've violated the sea by driftnet fishing and by making it a dumping ground. And the list goes on. So, a person could go through a long list and a wide range of things pointing out the absurdity and destructiveness as well as the demonic modalities of the human presence. The clear-cutting of trees will make the Earth uninhabitable in the long run. The most monumental thing of all might be the destruction of the rain forest, which might be the most beautiful thing in the universe. One could very easily extend this line of thought to include the idea that we are committing the act of "bio-cide"– which in this case refers to the premeditated killing of life systems. And as time goes on, this kind of attitude

and behavior renders the earth less capable of supporting life in general. Although it may be impossible for humans to wipe out all life on the planet, we certainly can do extensive degradation. And we are.

Crowe: With all of this destruction going on, how do we go about reinventing a sustainable human culture?

Berry: If we are talking about tactics, the first thing is to limit the role of the automobile. The automobile in its overall influence, is certainly one of the most terrifying aspects today in the earth process. At present there are 400 million automobiles in the world.

With regards to reorienting our thinking, the most important thing is to establish an awareness that we humans are part of a larger community of life. We cannot survive without the other components of the life process. We are damaging ourselves with every injury that we inflict on everything else on the planet.

Crow: As a part of the process of establishing a more conscientious awareness, what part might ritual play in the renewal process? Are there economic as well as ecological and psychological rituals that might help us out of our modern-day dilemmas?

Berry: First of all, a person could take our traditional rituals and bring them into some relationship with the need to renew the earth. For instance, we could hold festivals for the planting of seed. We could celebrate the forest. I am also suggesting that ritual play a part of celebrating the transformation moments of the universe itself. Transformation moments are sacred

moments. For instance, when day passes into night—this is one of the most sacred moments in the diurnal liturgy of the universe. These are the mystical moments in the daily cycle. With the annual cycle, the solstices and equinoxes carry great religious significance. The different religions of the world tend to associate humans with the great liturgy of the universe. Now if that were truly done, it would create a basis for what we should be doing ritually.

I think we should celebrate the super-nova explosions. When the elements were formed, when the first generation stars exploded, that was a great spiritual-religious moment as well as a physical moment. Just think of the religious significance of the elements? Without the elements you wouldn't have trees; you wouldn't have intelligence. You wouldn't have any of these. This is a sacrificial moment. The first generation stars helped to produce the super-nova explosions that created the elements and then splashed them out into the universe. Only then do the second generation stars take shape out of this swirling mass of stardust. Then the sun and our solar system take shape.

There are so many things that could be celebrated religiously in conjunction with this. The sun is a Christ symbol. It is from the wind that we get the idea of spirit. So much more could be made of the wind or even the atmosphere in terms of ritual.

Just think, the earth had to take shape in a very, very special kind of way. It had to be just so far from the sun, so that it wouldn't be too hot or too cold. It had to have a radius just right. If the radius of the sun were only a little larger, the planet would have turned

out like Jupiter. A little smaller, and it would have been rock-bound, like Mars. It had to be just so. The earth had to position the moon just right because if the moon were a little closer to the earth, the tides would have overcome the continents and life couldn't have emerged. Yet if the moon were a little farther away, the seas would be stagnant.

One of the most beautiful of these transformation moments with regard to the shaping of the earth is when the flowers came: The Flower Revolution. The Cenozoic period pertaining to the geological earth history is so important because this is when the flowers came. And because the flowers came, there were now seeds, the proteins, the grasses, fruits and life of this nature for the first time. All of this preceded human habitation on the planet.

It is difficult for us because we don't have emotional rapport, excitement, or a real understanding of these things because we've always thought that these cosmic and geological moments are simply physical things. Until these kinds of moments are "sacralized" in some way and celebrated, the story of the universe is not going to be effective in bringing us to the sense of the sacred nature of the life system and evoking in us a certain reverence, a certain awe, and a certain and sustaining intimacy with the larger life system as a whole.

Crowe: In your book you write, "There must be a mystique of the rain if we are able to restore the purity of the rainfall." Could you elaborate a little on this?

Berry: As soon as a person understands the mystique of the rain or the water, then they are naturally horri-

fied by the practice of polluting the water and become sensitive to what happens to water. Unless we develop what I am calling a "new religious sensitivity" that would provide us humans with a certain awe for the vegetable and animal world that would cause us to be afraid to damage it, we are going to continue, I'm afraid, to plunder and pillage the very foundations for life itself on this planet. A good healthy respect, a good healthy fear may be what is needed here. The infusion of mystique into our human belief systems and religious practices is one essential way to bring this about.

Crowe: I'd like to give you the chance to play prophet for a moment by asking you an imaginative, hypothetical question. Imagine you are John, author of Revelation in the Bible, reincarnated and exiled to the island of Patmos. As a prophet of the present, what is your vision of the future? I'm anticipating you would have a slightly different vision for "the final days."

Berry: Maybe not so different! All I would say is that I have forebodings about the future—although with a sense of ambivalence. I do, however, have extensive hopes for the future, because we are learning.

In recent years, I think we have passed over a threshold of sorts, in which we have become much more sensitized and much more conscious of the issues of relating to the natural world. Based on this I think that there is a certain amount of really valid hope for the future. But the amount of damage being done, say to the rain forest, the damage being done to the marine life, the damage that is being done on every continent,

is overwhelming. And when a person thinks that the human population may double in the next forty years, I fear it's going to be a period of enormous difficulties. The amount of tragedy is just going to be overwhelming. At the same time, our capacity to work towards a liveable, sustainable life system is being formed and cultivated.

One of the things that I would like to see is a change in our thinking from "sustainable development" to "sustainable life." I say this because, in my mind, the idea of "sustainable development" is a contradiction. In other words, we can't sustain life with our present ideas concerning uncontrolled development. The two ideas side by side this way are just not compatible.

So, yes, I think we live in difficult times. I was asked recently, "Since you are not that young anymore, what is the inspiration that drives you to dedicate so much of your energy to this topic?" I'll answer your question the same way I responded to that reporter: The children. I couldn't dare to let a world damaged this severely to be handed over to our children without a significant protest and an effort to do something about it.

The Path of Blessing

Marcia Prager

One summer evening after a Jewish women's retreat, I was invited to have dinner with one of the participants and her family. In our brief pre-dinner conversation her husband, Stan, spoke of his years of Buddist practice—such a welcome refuge from the intrusively demanding but vacant formulas of his Jewish upbringing. He had only recently begun to re-explore Jewish practice, he said, but it wasn't until dinner began that I learned why. We sat at the table and when the food was served, everybody looked at me. Not because I was a guest, but because I was, after all, a rabbi, and, well, wasn't I supposed to say something?

Rabbi Marcia Prager is a teacher, storyteller, artist, and therapist. She serves as rabbi-haver of The Philadelphia P'nai or Religious Fellowship. Marcia will present a workshop on this topic during Companions on the Path, Fellowship in Prayer's 50th Anniversary Conference to be held in Princeton, NJ, June 16, 17, 18, 2000.

From The Path of Blessing *by Marcia Prager, published by Bell Tower, copyright © 1998 by Marcia Prager. Used by permission.*

Everyone waited. I looked around, absorbing the goodness of the people gathered at the table. With a deep breath I reached toward the basket of warm dinner rolls and lifted it up, closing my eyes to be alone with the sensations. Steamy hot, just baked bread. I inhaled its warm sweetness. For just a moment it seemed that I held the fertile earth sprouting ripening wheat and saw the dough rising in an extravagant explosion of yeast. My fingertips touched the hot loaves. I sang: *"Barukh Ata Adonay Eloheynu Melekh ha'Olam ha'Motzi Lechem Min ha'Aretz."* "A Fountain of Blessing are You, Source of Life of all the Worlds, Source of the nourishment that is this bread, which You bring out from the earth." We shared the warm bread around the table and then Stan spoke.

"I grew up so angry," he said. "All these blessings, these *brakhas* and prayers that I had to memorize, always some rote formula to recite, another phrase to mumble. When I finally discovered Buddhism, it was such a relief. I embraced meditation and cultivated a practice of insight and mindfulness. It was only because of my deepening relationship with Judy that I began to be anywhere near practicing Jews again. But there was the same obsessive-compulsive stuff that I hated before. Every time they used something or saw something or ate something, there was another interruption and another mumble. It was so annoying. I was so grateful to be past that.

"One day, I don't remember what I was doing, it hit me! I was with someone and he stopped what he was doing to make a *brakha*. Like you just did. Suddenly I got it! All those years cultivating mindfulness and I didn't see. Making a *brakha*, the act of blessing, it

is a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is what blessing IS."

We were quiet. Then we all grinned. I began to speak about exploring the Jewish spiritual practice of blessing.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

A simple Hebrew blessing is a powerful thing—a one minute, deeply meditative exercise exploring the nature of the Creative Force we call God and the dynamic relationship between God, human consciousness and the unfolding universe. Far from a mindless mumble, each word of a Hebrew blessing is crafted to touch deep centers of awareness and receptivity within us. Each word is a stepping stone inviting us to explore a rich treasury of images and associations.

Blessing offers us a personal consciousness-raising practice, a spiritual adventure bringing sensitivity and gratitude into the foreground of our lives. While we all have moments when a blessing rises spontaneously to our lips, the path of blessing can become a way of life.

Through the practice of blessing we develop an ever-deepening receptivity to the abundant love and joy flowing through creation. We learn to accept that love, absorb it into our souls, and offer it back to the source with joy. In this way we come to feel the Presence of God move within us and through us. The result is bliss.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The Hebrew word for blessing is *brakha* (plural *brakhot*, or sometimes more colloquially *brakhas*). The Jewish practice of blessing derives from our tradition's

desire to promote joy and appreciation, wonder and thankfulness, amazement and praise. A *brakha* is, we could say, a kind of "gratitude yoga" we can employ not only on a daily basis but moment-to-moment. It is in itself not at all strenuous. It doesn't require a *minyan*, ten worshippers; it doesn't require travel; it doesn't require that we have any accoutrements, or a special mantra or that we become a yogi, an adept, a *tzaddik*, or a *buddha*. It merely asks us to engage in a moment of delayed gratification, using the respite as an opportunity for something else to occur.

Each blessing turns on the tap of God's love.

Just as every seventh day we separate out *Shabbos*, a sabbath, in order to remove ourselves from the physical work of the world, dedicating time to the work of the soul, so in making a *brakha* we separate out time before we consume, use, or enjoy something of the world in order to create a space where something other than thoughtless appropriation can unfold. As we grow in the path of blessing we become open to a more expansive way of being. Through blessing, we uncover the infinitely abundant Presence of God in even the smallest action.

Jewish tradition teaches that the simple action of a *brakha* has a cosmic effect, for a *brakha* causes *shefa*, the "abundant flow" of God's love and goodness to pour into the world. Like a hand on the faucet, each *brakha* turns on the tap.

How delicious it is to live in God's goodness. Too often we walk uncaring and unconscious through our jobs and lives, oblivious to the love that surrounds us and is in us. When, however, we live in the abundant

Robert Campbell

flow, we know ourselves to be loved and supported unconditionally. Only then do we become free both to receive and give fully.

Each acknowledgement of divine abundance cycles more blessing into the world. Thus all of life is enriched. Jewish consciousness carries a deep awareness that in order for the cycles to continue—whether those of an individual human life, community life, the seasons, or the universe—they need to be nourished. When we fail to cultivate a practice of appreciation as potent as our capacity to appropriate, we become despoilers, destroying both ourselves and the whole. When we use the world as if it belongs to us, we use it as we would a possession. The practice of blessing recognizes that consuming without returning the gift of our conscious awareness makes us in a way like thieves.

In the first book of the *Talmud*, *Brakhot*, a detailed record of early rabbinic teachings on blessing and prayer, one teacher unabashedly exclaims," Anyone who derives pleasure from this world without a *brakha* is stealing from God!"

Another rabbi goes even further. "Each of us," he says, "will be called to give account for the innocent delights of the world which our eyes saw, but which we didn't let our mouths taste. However, one who delights of this world without a *brakha* is like a robber, because the *brakha* is what causes the continuation of the divine flow of *shefa* into the world. [All of creation is fashioned of sparks of divinity, and so] when the *brakha* is offered with directed awareness and purposeful intention, we avoid becoming destructive agents who selfishly hoard the sparks of divine energy in the food. By blessing the Source of the fruit/food . . . we

purify and release the sparks back into the life sustaining flow of holiness."

A *brakha* completes our energy-exchange with God. We are partners in a sacred cycle of giving and receiving in which we are not only "on the take." When we offer our blessings we raise up sparks of holiness, releasing the God-light housed in our world back to its Source. We receivers become the givers, and the nurturing flow is sustained. When, on the other hand, we receive but fail to give, we become clogged, sick, and destructive. When we fail to praise, it is we who suffer. Without gratitude we become bored and depressed. This teaching, so fundamental to the Jewish practice of blessing, is movingly reflected as well in the poetry of Rumi, the Sufi poet, "Your depression is connected to your insolence and refusal to praise! Whoever feels himself walking on the path and refuses to praise—that man or woman steals from others every day—is a shoplifter!"

Imagine that at every moment we each embraced the world as the gift it is: An apple is a gift; the color pink is a gift; the blue sky is a gift; the scent of honeysuckle is a gift. Hidden in every experience is a gift, obligating us to heart-filled appreciation, to songs of gratitude. We are called not merely to notice casually now and then that something is special and nice but to sustain and deepen a profound and sustained gratitude. Indeed the more we acknowledge our gratefulness, the more we temper our tendency to be users, despoilers, arrogant occupiers.

We are on our way to *kedusha*, sacredness or holiness.

Plan Now To Come To This Life-Enhancing Event!

Companions on the Sacred Journey

June 16, 17, 18, 2000 ~ Princeton, New Jersey

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faculty, Union Theological Seminary

and

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Prayer to do Your Work Well

Kirsten Dolby

If prayer must be supplication,
let all my life be this request:

Give me the strength
to give my strength to You;
Give me the humility
to give to You my weakness.

Give me the courage
to surrender my fears to Your will,
and the wisdom
to lay my intellect in ignorance.

Sustain in me
all that You would have from me–
let die into non-existence
all that is not Yours;

That I may give
no less than I am given,
love no less
than Love itself requires.

Kirsten Dolby works and writes poetry from Saudi Arabia.

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SACRED JOURNEY ✍ Reader Survey ✍

Your opinions matter to us!

Two years ago we changed our name to *SACRED JOURNEY* with your overwhelming approval. We've updated our format and most of you seem to like that, too. This journal exists for your benefit. Please help us plan future issues by completing this questionnaire. You can fax it: (609) 924-6910 or mail it: 291 Witherspoon St., Princeton, NJ 08540 in a postage paid envelope from a recent issue. You may e-mail responses to editorial@sacredjourney.org

1) How did you like our recent interviews? Please rank each article.
1–*I liked it!* 2-*I flipped through it.* 3-*Didn't find it interesting.*

___ April 1998 Danny Martin, *Belonging and Longing,* Celtic Spirituality
___ August 1998 Robert Kennedy, Jesuit priest and Zen Roshi, *The Path of Emptiness*
___ February 1999 Rachel Remen, *Below the Surface,* Medical Doctor and therapist to cancer patients
___ June 1999 Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Facing East: A Journey Into Eastern Orthodoxy*
___ August 1999 Ron Roth, *Healing Into Wholeness*

2) Who should we interview or feature in future issues? Please list names and identify by title, location, and institutional affiliation, if possible.

4) What do you like best about the journal?

5) What have you found uninteresting or not to your liking?

6) What would you like to see more of in *SACRED JOURNEY?*

7) What other publications do you read regularly?

8) What is your religious or denominational affiliation, if applicable?

3) Please rate our regular features. Circle 1 for those you regularly read and like. Circle a 5 for those you never read nor enjoy.

	Like				Dislike
A Transforming Experience	1	2	3	4	5
The Ways of Prayer	1	2	3	4	5
Spirituality & Aging	1	2	3	4	5
Spirituality & Healing	1	2	3	4	5
Spirituality & The Familiy	1	2	3	4	5
Spirituality & Everyday Life	1	2	3	4	5
Spirituality & Service	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual Community	1	2	3	4	5
Illuminations	1	2	3	4	5
Prayers	1	2	3	4	5
Poetry	1	2	3	4	5
From the President	1	2	3	4	5
From the Editor	1	2	3	4	5
Letters & Links	1	2	3	4	5

Add any comments about regular features here:

9) What spiritual practices do you regularly incorporate into your life? (For instance, meditation, reading of sacred texts, small group participation, retreats, yoga, etc.)

10) Why do you read *SACRED JOURNEY?* Please rank the following by most important as 1 to least important as 5.

___ To find help for my problems
___ To learn about other faith traditions
___ To expand my understanding of spiritual practices
___ For inspiration
___ As a resource for an ongoing prayer group or worship event
___ Other (please elaborate)

11) What writing style do you prefer as you read *SACRED JOURNEY?*

___ First-person experiences with examples of how spiritual practices and faith impact everyday life. Our regular feature *A Transforming Experience* is an example of this style.

___ Conceptual articles that challenge me intellectually (This month's interview "The Old/New Cosmic Story" with Thomas Berry or "The Spiritual Quest" by Carolyn Humphreys in our February 1998 issue are examples of this style.)

Do you have a faith experience, a spiritual practice or interfaith topic you would like to see in *SACRED JOURNEY?*
Are you a writer or photographer? Contact us!

The suggested donation for a year of *Sacred Journey* is $16.00. Many readers, however, send more than that amount as a way of becoming a "Spiritual Friend" to those unable to contribute (especially men and women in hospitals, nursing and old age homes, and religious institutions).

In addition to sending in your own contribution and request to receive *Sacred Journey,* won't you become a "Spiritual Friend" to someone in need? You will earn their lasting gratitude—and ours.

☐ I enclose $16.00 ($22.00 for foreign subscriptions). Please send *Sacred Journey* to me:

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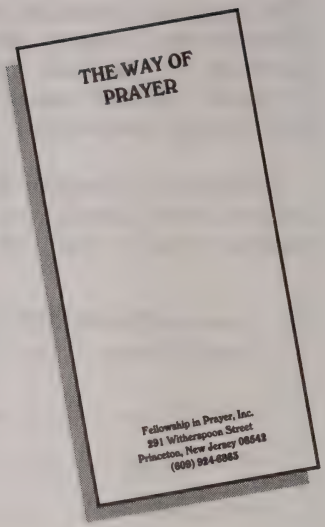
☐ Please remove my name from your mailing list.

Please use the back of this sheet for your comments.

The Way of Prayer answers the questions of many readers who have asked us specific questions about prayer: When, where, and how to pray; what to pray for; what you can expect from prayer; how to form a prayer group.

Copies are $2.00 each. Now in its 3rd printing, *The Way of Prayer* has clearly filled a widely-felt need.

☐ Please send me _____ copies of *The Way of Prayer*. I enclose my check for $ _____.



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Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

Every Creature a Hymn

Eastern Orthodox Prayer

O you who covers the high places with waters,
who sets the sand as a bound to the sea and upholds all things:
the sun sings your praises, the moon gives you glory,
Every creature offers a hymn to you, his author and creator forever.

Holy Groves

Chinook Psalter

How lovely are thy holy groves
God of heaven and earth
My soul longs and faints
for the circle of thy trees.
My heart and my flesh
sing with joy to thee
O God of life.

Every Creature a Hymn and Holy Groves are from The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Personal Prayer from the World's Spiritual Traditions *(A Fellowship in Prayer Book). This book can be purchased from Fellowship in Prayer by mail. The cost is $19.95 for hard cover or $12.95 for soft cover, plus $3.00 for postage and handling. Mail it in the post-paid envelope found in the center of the journal. Please allow 4 weeks delivery. Sorry, we are unable to accept credit cards.*

Woman's Well

Joni Woelfel

Several years ago, I faced a season in my life that called for horrendous healing following a complicated surgery. It took an act of the soul to even find enough strength to sit in a chair. During that time, I wrote repeatedly in my journal that I felt like I had been thrust into a deep well.

Day after day, week after week, I wrote, "Still in the well." At the time, I was staying at the lakeside home of my aunt and uncle, who were offering me sanctuary. The whole period I was there, I was never strong enough to walk down to the lake's edge, even though I longed to with everything in me. I knew it would speak to me if I could only walk along the sandy beach, listen to the waves lap the shore and feel the mist on my face. The raw, sensory part of me felt like it was crying out for the experience.

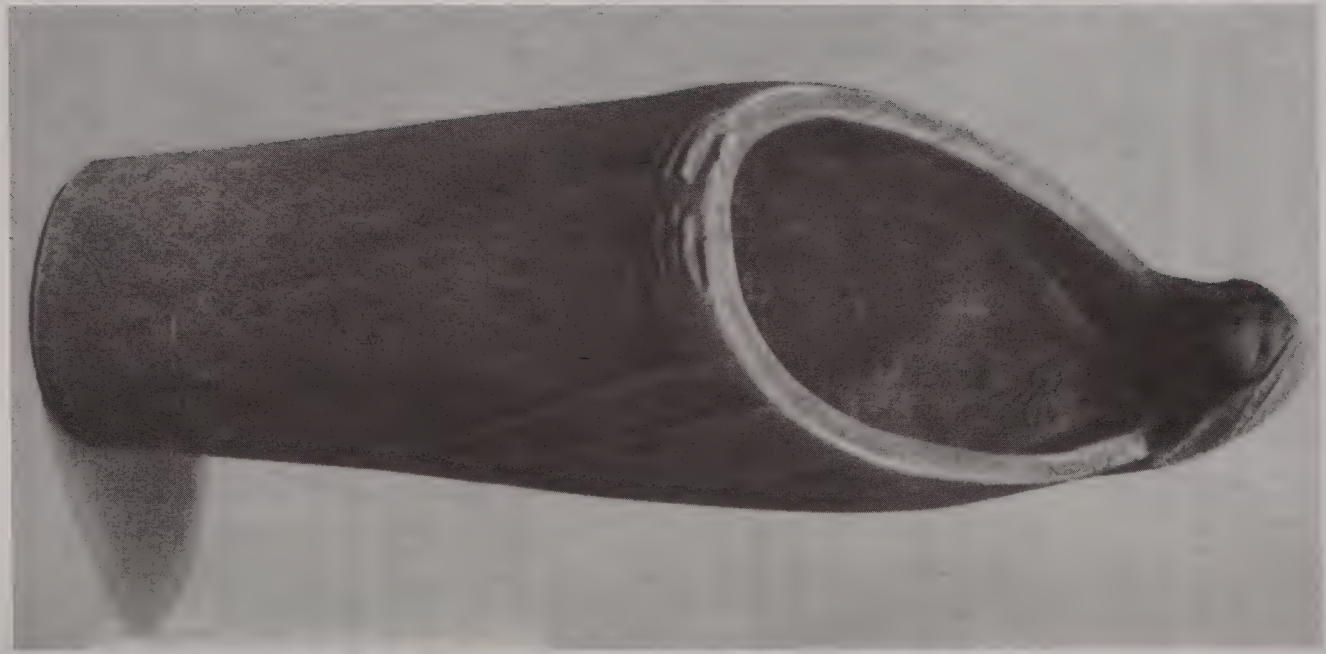
Joni Woelfel is a freelance writer from the village of Seaforth, MN. She writes the column "Deep are the Roots" for the Wabasso Standard *and just completed a book-length manuscript on the illness experience, which she says is "the unfolding of a healing journey to wellness of the soul."*

Yet, all I could do was experience the strong spirit of place that the lake evoked through the large picture window from a distance. At night, I would lie in bed in my cozy room, knowing that the moonlit, shimmering presence was just yards away, summoning me like a friend even when I slept. When I left two weeks later, I sadly said, "Goodbye Lake," through the car window, watching as we drove away until it disappeared from sight. I had not been able to go to it even once. It was as if a plug had been pulled. I felt as if my life force energy had been drained nearly out, my body serving as the framework of a well gone dry.

The mental dimness of those days is something I remember clearly now that much time has passed. I remember how valiantly I had tried to make sense of the experience, how desperately I had tried to find a spiritual stronghold. When I reread the shallow, disjointed words I wrote, it is plain that there was no great revelation nor answers found. I wish that I could go back to myself and say, "Don't try so hard, relax, put the pen away, unfold, and hear gently. Let go of the desire for mindfulness when your body is simply too sick to function that way."

It was not until several years later that I found a sculpted image done by Mary Southard, that personified that time from my life. The title of the image is *Woman's Well,* cast in plaster and depicting a woman whose very body is a well, with her hands enfolding the rim at waist height while her hair spills down the back. Light quickly fades to dark shadows inside the well woman, suggesting depth and hidden mystery. The image is powerful, crafted with great simplicity and strength.

When I was desperately ill, I only saw the well as a prison. The life-giving water, represented by the lake,



Woman's Well by Mary Southard. Photo courtesy of the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange.

that seemed just out of reach. The sense of energy and beauty of it was wrenching because it symbolized a vitality that illness had diminished within me. I would stare at the water through the window, mesmerized and lost to myself. Now, through Mary's sculpture, the perspective has come full circle. The woman's well is a channel, through which the current of God's compassion and presence flows regardless of how emptied by suffering we may feel.

On days when weakness threatens to make me feel entombed, it is reassuring to call forth the image of the woman whose arms embrace and surround the rim of the well, opening herself to love, healing, and hope. Her arms are stretched as far and wide as she can reach, to welcome and allow good to flow through her. Her voice, as pure as life giving water is saying, "You are never *in* a well, you *are* a well. Draw deeply from the waters of faith."

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Tashlich: Casting off Sinprints

Allen S. Maller

Many people carry around the footprints of people who have walked all over them. These sinprints often stay on us for years after the original events. They usually weigh us down and often keep us from growing.

How can we reduce the weight of these sinprints? Reconciliation is the best way, but it takes two to effect a reconciliation. If the person whose sinprints still burden us is unrepentant (or deceased) what can we do on our own to lighten the load?

Jewish tradition provides a way called *Tashlich.* This ceremony developed in the Middle Ages in connection with Rosh Hashannah—the Jewish New Year. If one wants to make the New Year better than the last year, one has to change some of the things that led us to hurt people and also to rid ourselves of things that make us vulnerable to the sins of others. The High Holy Days concentrate our attention on the need to change our behavior. *Tashlich* focuses our attention on the need to change our attitudes by visibly casting off the sinprints of others.

After the Rosh Hashannah morning service, people would walk to a nearby stream or river, take bread crumbs

Allen S. Maller is rabbi of Temple Akiba in Culver City, CA and is a frequent contributor to Sacred Journey. *This year Rosh Hashannah began at sundown on September 10.*

from their pockets, cast (*Tashlich*) the crumbs into the water and watch the current carry away the sinprints, i.e., the many crummy things that had happened to them in the past. To have a better year we need to purify ourselves of our sinprints as well as our sins.

At Temple Akiba, in Culver City, CA, we have developed a worksheet to help people focus on the hurtful sinprints they need to cast off. The worksheet is distributed after the Rosh Hashannah evening service. (A copy of the worksheet is found on the following page.) People are asked to fill out the worksheet that night or the next morning. Then they crush the worksheet up with a five or ten dollar bill inside, and prior to or subsequent to the Rosh Hashannah morning service they cast the crushed up ball of paper into a large cardboard box. The money is donated to a shelter for battered women. The alleviation of one's own troubles should always be combined with helping others.

During the last few years when we have done *Tashlich* in this way, people have often told me that the process had made them feel somewhat less burdened by the sinprints of the past.

TASHLICH

LET GO OF HURT WORKSHEET

1. Name of the person who hurt me:

2. Name the pain he or she said/did:

3. Face the hurt. I felt:

4. What results did this have on my life?

5. Are there any aspects of this situation that are my responsibility?

6. What did I learn from this negative experience that helped me avoid or minimize being victimized again?

7. How long has this pain bothered me and what have I done about it?

8. In order to free myself from this pain I will cast off (let go) by . . .

9. Wrap this *Tashlich* paper around some money and deposit it in a donation box. The money will help others.

Autumn Reflections

Richard J. Broderick

I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Many people I know seem to dread the approach of winter. Summer's lush life is spent. Autumn has displayed her gypsy costumes and now it seems as though life has been harvested from the earth. Soon winter's deep sleep will fall quietly on the earth. The cycle of nature is completing its eternal life rhythm.

For those of us who live in the Northern Hemisphere, I believe that we can harvest much inspiration and meaning for our lives during this time of plenty and prayer. The quietness of the season is conducive to meditation and reflection as the earth lies fallow and birds begin their mysterious migration to other lands. The seeds that fall on the earth in autumn will carry their delicate life through winter to resurrection of new life in the spring. The Catholic liturgy speaks about a life that is changed, not ended.

Richard J. Broderick is a Catholic priest from Cohoes, NY, and a frequent contributor to SACRED JOURNEY.

Late fall is a time of reflection for me. I am drawn to meditating on some of the profound mysteries of our faith during these days: The communion of saints, the resurrection of the dead, and the promise of life everlasting. I owe some of my appreciation to the way the Mexican community celebrates *Los Dia de Muertos—a* traditional Mexican holiday that honors the dead.

Far from being a somber and sad day, it is instead a day of festivity and celebration. Families, vendors, musicians, all pour out into streets and cemeteries to be with their beloved deceased. The tombstones are scrubbed clean, weeds are uprooted, and brightly colored cloths are laid out over the graves. The favorite foods of those who died are placed on top along with cut flowers. Candles are lit and burn day and night. The entire day is spent talking, eating, praying, and singing in communion with their loved ones whose spirits are present with them in celebration. Death is mocked as children share candies shaped like skulls and parades wind through crowded streets carrying a coffin with a smiling corpse in it. People laugh and taunt death which is always close by. It is a celebration of community, communion with the dead, and a profession of faith as a wooden cross, a sign of Christian hope, marks the graves. During this time Monarch butterflies, with light-laced wings, are flying through the land on migration to the mountains of Michoacan. They are symbols of the souls of the dead coming home.

The celebration is brought into the home as well. Small wooden tables are set up in corners and adorned with small bright cloths, candles, a cross, unframed photos of the dead, fruit and bread, and some marigold flowers in a small vase. The dead are home with them.

This is a ritual I now celebrate. Each November on All Saints/All Souls Day I create a small altar and put photos

of deceased family and friends on it. I make up a list of people I wish to remember in prayer and place it there. The list includes some people in the news: Ethnic Albanians, the innocent men, women and children assassinated in Acteal, Mexico, others in Quiche, Guatemala. Standing near this altar I realize what Celtic spirituality means by a thin place when describing some of their holy places. Only a thin veil separates us from those who have gone on before us. Standing near this table I sense it is a thin place.

This ritual is a reminder of those whose lives have intertwined with mine. It is a reminder of the gift we are to each other in this life. It strengthens my faith by drawing me deeper into the profound prayers and scripture of the liturgies of All Saints/All Souls. I celebrate the communion of the saints I have known. Those men and women, friends, and family who are not on any official list of saints but whose lives embodied the Gospel. The November sky puts me in touch with how the Church's liturgical seasons of life and death are connected to the sacramental seasons of nature. Harvest and homecoming are connected. Life and death are partners in the dance.

Only a thin veil separates us from those who have gone on before us.

These special days can be reminders of life's brevity and the precious gift of time left to live it. It offers us the opportunity to focus on what's really important in our lives: Our faith, life shared with our families and friends. This month I am renewed in the hope expressed in the book of Revelation. "He will wipe away all tears from their eyes and there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone . . . I am making the whole of creation new." (Rev. 21: 4-5)

Tender Presences

Renee Carrier

In the early morning of Halloween the monastery lay enveloped in a thick, dense fog. Hoar frost clung to trees, shrubs, and spider webs strung between tall grasses. The mist hung appropriate for a day designated as the time when the "veil between the worlds" lifts momentarily. As if to show that we live in a "cloud of unknowing" most of the time, heavy, wet air covered the earth like a blanket of cold mystery. Any revelation would have to be offered, not sought.

Two days before, I had arrived to make a weeklong retreat at San Benito where I am a lay associate of this particular Benedictine house in north-central Wyoming. "Oblation is a way to seek God in the mist of everyday life," reads a brochure I was given. Saint Benedict wrote his "little Rule for beginners" in the sixth century for monastics in

Renee Carrier is associated with San Benito Monastery in Wyoming. Her "day job" consists of giving GED tests, substituting, writing, making music, and raising a son and daughter. She and her family tend an orchard/garden croft in the Black Hills of Wyoming.

response to the times and confusion, and to propose a sensible way to practice the teachings of Christ, the prophets, and in particular, the Psalms.

"Peace" is the Benedictine watchword. Its meaning is what drew my attention.

I first visited the monastery in 1994. Misunderstood directions from a convenience store owner in Dayton led me nearly ten miles on graveled roads deeper and deeper into the shadow of the Big Horn Mountains. I turned around and drove back towards town and discovered my mistake. A wrong turn. I crossed the Tongue River, turned left onto another graveled road, and finally came to a small, inconspicuous sign that read "San Benito Monastery." Great cottonwoods grown in rows hung their embracing limbs over the main house, garage, workhouse, classroom, two guest houses, and two structures that appeared to be root cellars but housed wells and plumbing. A low, wooden roofed cupola held a large bell. Names of saints, "Tekakwitha," "Scholastica," inscribed on plaques peeked from the corners of the Prussian blue painted buildings. My footsteps made the only sound I heard.

I strangely felt no hesitation in knocking on the door of the main house. No one answered. A determination born of more than curiosity led me around back to the other buildings. When I knocked, the door open to Sister Hope. An automatic grin appeared on her face, an open heart. She apologized that she was the only one home today as the other four sisters were off doing errands and such and would I like a tour and a cup of tea? She looked genuinely happy to receive me. I studied her unconsciously as she showed me the grounds, thirty-eight acres crossed by the Tongue River and well-worn paths, one winding past Stations of the Cross affixed to trees and fence posts. A certain sigh still

Brooks Walsh

emanates from the great gnarled box elder upon which the station depicting Christ's crucifixion is nailed.

My questions roll one after the other as I wonder if I'm not bothering this nun, who calls herself a "monk," an admission I find utterly wonderful and validating to my own sensibilities and aspirations. I've been studying Zen, I tell her, and sitting meditation. She becomes excited and walks quickly over to a bookshelf to a pamphlet on dialogue with Buddhists and Hindus, all the while telling me that the pope is encouraging these dialogues in that he believes Truth resides in other religions as well as Christianity. I tell her that though I was raised a Catholic my relationship with the Church has been difficult.

I have many impressions of Sister Hope, now as friend and spiritual director—an "*anamchare*," in Gaelic, "soul

friend." Upon meeting the other monastics, especially Sister Rita, who shares my interest in Zen, I wrote to a friend that the sisters remind me of the faeries in Walt Disney's "Sleeping Beauty," adding a joke I've heard, that when Sleeping Beauty wakes up she is nearly fifty-years-old. So am I.

I return to San Benito for love of these women. They practice St. Benedict's precept to receive all guests as Christ. When I am resting there in the guest house, I sense a deep presence of nurturing and acceptance. After one of our conferences, I told Sister Hope that I felt as though I have had my virginity restored to me. She understood perfectly, and added that "virgin" originally meant "a woman wholly unto herself." Holy.

While helping Sister Rita to prepare a meal one day I ventured to ask this woman, for whom I was becoming fond, where had she grown up. "In my mother's house," she coyly replied with a level gaze into my eyes. It stopped me from further questions, at least with regard to whom she was before her profession. She taught me in one moment what many hours of reading Zen could not: that the present moment as Eternity is enough and is all we have. Renunciation of one's former life, thoughts about one's former life, and eventually even one's *idea* of that which we call God, are three requisites of monasticism according to John Cassian, an early church doctor.

To live rurally, especially in Wyoming, is a double dip of isolation. Our population remains the lowest in the nation. The county I inhabit is thought by some to be at least fifty years behind the rest of the state, which straggles behind the rest of the country. Friendship then becomes equal to hospitality. The idea of a monastery in Wyoming's lonesome spaces recalls the first and second century anchorites of the Egyptian desert. Hospitality by Bedouin tribes was and still

is considered a sacred duty, a spiritual act, a "one never knows who the stranger really is," sort of thing.

At San Benito and at my monthly oblate chapter meeting in Gillette, the Sisters offer the hospitality of their generous spirits. Sometimes the class serves as a safe place to unburden our worldly cares; we seek through study of the Rule, its practical application in our lives.

A fellow oblate and I correspond by e-mail now almost daily. We have forged a friendship through our commonality. It was Sister Hope who first saw Mona's and my potential friendship—an apt name for a vessel, a capacity, a possibility; we drink from a common well and fish from this common sea. Being oblates of the same age, with children and husbands, our experiences naturally parallel more than those of the Sisters, who despite their own struggles, counsel us with clarity of purpose and methods for achieving a peaceful and harmonious life. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine, writes in her commentary on the Rule, "Our role, insists the Rule, is simply to try to soothe what hurts people, heal what weakens them, lift what burdens them and wait. The spiritual life is a process–not an event. It takes our patient presence."

To live rurally is a double dip of isolation. Friendship becomes hospitality.

In Wyoming, this most rural state, a desert really, we are called to become tender presences to one another, and at certain times even to admonish one another in love, to me, the more difficult task.

When I moved through the mists on that eve of All Saint's Day, three horses stood outside the fence but still on monastery land. I approached them slowly, brood mares all who did not mind my rubbing their neck and flanks. We stood in

rapt contemplation of one another in this ocean of soupy air. I was flooded with love at the site of a foal who trotted up, who offered trust and friendliness. His eyes looked so young and earnest, still like a child's, open and expectant. Patches of bright light, illumination, opened corners of the field. Frost shone like isinglass. The sun had begun to burn off the low-lying clouds to reveal an alpine blue sky above us. Here, revelation reaches me.

NEWS of the sacred journey . . .

We're delighted by the strong response we're getting to our announcements about "Companions on the Sacred Journey," our 50th Anniversary celebration in Princeton, June 16, 17, 18, in the year 2000. Several hundred of you have already notified us that you plan to come or have requested an information brochure. Please wait to send the registration fee until you complete the registration form in the brochure that will be mailed to you early in 2000. Do mark your calendars. Do plan to come. Excitement is building. We feel it.

Darkness

Andrea C. Burman

pillow-smooth darkness
coats my ears,
pads my mouth,
quiets my wandering eyes.
there are no bearings,
no physical points of reference
here in this black, vast space;
rather, a silent voice
probes and pricks
my numb spirit.
cutting it open as a surgeon
lays bare its sleeping patient.
through this thick layer of silence
he slides the needle,
injecting my spirit with his
so that in this darkness,
this silence,
i might gain the courage
to fly inward and out,
upward into his holy,
incomprehensible embrace,
and in darkness,
find my way to light.

Andrea C. Burman writes and performs her poetry from her home in Northridge, CA. Her work recently appeared in the New Oxford Review.

Spirit #12

Carl A. Wertman

My path lies
obscured beneath
autumn leaves. Be
for me the wind
allowing my heart
to see.

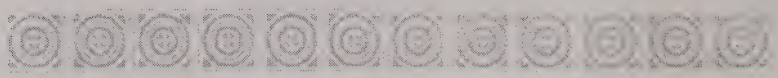
Prayer—Moon-mirror

Hilary Thompson

He is in all his glory—his Sunday suit, his opening heart.
He kneels in God's presence and he prays.
As moonlight creeps into a dark between clouds,
Christ's love slides onto the dark planet in his center
lighting pathways among forests and dark shadows.
Realising the emptiness, the need inside,
he calls out to be filled with Spirit and Love–
God's sun reflected on Christ's moon mirror
brightens and warms his heart.

Carl A. Wertman's poetry has appeared in Crosscurrents, The Christian Science Monitor, *and* The Maine Review. *He lives in San Angelo, TX. Hilary Thompson writes from Nova Scotia.*

ILLUMINATIONS



What is generosity? It is nobility, it is expansion of heart. As the heart expands, so the horizon becomes wide, and one finds greater and greater scope in which to build the kingdom of God.

-Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan

Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.

-Teilhard de Chardin

To enjoy the benefits of providence is wisdom; to enable others to enjoy them is virtue. He who is indifferent to the welfare of others does not deserve to be called human. The best way to worship God is to ease the distress of the times and to improve the condition of humanity. This is true religion; to cleanse oneself with pure thoughts, pure words, and pure deeds.

-Zoroastrian Scriptures,
The Zend-Avesta

I do not believe that the meaning of life is a puzzle to be solved. Life is. I am. Anything can happen. And I believe I may invest my life with meaning.

-Abraham Joshua Heschel

Perhaps the reason angels can fly is because they take themselves lightly.

-G. K. Chesterton

Natural Reminder of God's Love

Mary L. Davidson

Many of us are often so busy with our daily routines that it is difficult to find time for prayer during the day. We begin our day with a period of reading, meditation, and prayer when we give the Lord our undivided attention. We might pray with others formally or informally, or center ourselves in God just by being with God for a while. But once our prayer is over and we begin to work, our thoughts often may not turn to God again until hours later.

It is known that Saint Teresa of Avila, the Carmelite Spanish mystic, tried to pray without ceasing. She looked for practical, down-to-earth ways to practice the presence of God. For her, water became a silent but powerful reminder of God's love.

When it rained, she thought of God's blessings raining down on all people and creatures. When St. Teresa drank water, she reflected that God's presence satisfied her thirst for God just as the cool water quenched her bodily thirst. She knew that we cannot become clean without water. It is cooling, soothing, cleansing, refreshing.

Mary L. Davidson is a special education teacher from Virginia who is married with two children. She writes a column for the Arlington Catholic Herald.

Robert Campbell

For me, another daily natural reminder of the love of God is the sight of leaves. They are profuse and lovely. They are present on an almost infinite variety of trees, and no two of them are alike. Their green is the color most soothing to human sight. Like God's love, leaves are prodigiously given for all to enjoy.

Leaves cleanse the smothering, poisonous carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with the pure and life-giving oxygen we so often take for granted. Without them we would not survive. They nourish us and cleanse the very air we breathe.

Sometimes leaves hang still, silently waiting through both day and night. In breezes they rustle, whispering reassurances of God's love. During storms they show God's power.

The blazing beauty of their autumn colors is well-known to us. The leaves fall and the branches are bare, reminding us that we will have pain. We may have times when God's love seems distant and our lives feel barren. Even in those times, in faith and hope we know that the spring will come. We know that new life will appear in the lovely young green of spring.

As St. Teresa did, we can use the plentiful ordinary experience of nature as a quiet, personal way to bring our thoughts to God, even if just for a few moments. God has blessed us with so many reminders of love. All we need do is to train our hearts to see them.

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